

## II. PERMANENCY

### Permanency Outcome 1

<b>Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.</b>					
<b>Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:</b>					
	<b>Jackson County</b>	<b>Jasper County</b>	<b>St. Louis County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
Substantially Achieved:	7	1	1	9	34.6
Partially Achieved:	2	5	6	13	50.0
Not Achieved or Addressed:	3	0	1	4	15.4
Not Applicable:	12	6	6		
<b>Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:</b>					
	<b>National Standard (percentage)</b>	<b>State's Percentage</b>	<b>Meets Standard</b>	<b>Does Not Meet Standard</b>	
Foster care re-entries	8.6 or less	8.5	X		
Length of time to achieve reunification	76.2 or more	65.9		X	
Length of time to achieve adoption	32.0 or more	30.3		X	
Stability of foster care placements	86.7 or more	78.7		X	

## **STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 1**

Missouri did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 34.6 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.
- The State Data Profile indicates that for fiscal year (FY) 2002, the State did not meet the national standards for (1) the percentage of children reunified who were reunified within 12 months of the time of entry into foster care; (2) the percentage of children adopted who achieved a finalized adoption within 24 months of entry into foster care, or (3) the percentage of children in foster care for less than 12 months who experienced no more than 2 placements.

The FY 2002 data provided in the State Data Profile indicate that the State meets the national standard for the percentage of children entering foster care who were re-entering within 12 months of a prior foster care episode.

Although performance on this outcome was generally quite low, there was variation across CFSR sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 58 percent of Jackson County cases, compared to 17 percent of Jasper County cases and 12.5 percent of St. Louis County cases.

A key finding of the CFSR was that CD is effective in preventing re-entry into foster care (item 5). However, all other indicators for this outcome were rated as Areas Needing Improvement. Case reviewers determined that CD was not consistent in its efforts to (1) ensure children's placement stability while in foster care (item 6), (2) establish appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner (item 7), and (3) achieve children's permanency goals in a timely manner (items 8, 9, and 10).

Information from the case reviews and stakeholder interviews suggests that key barriers to attaining permanency in a timely manner are: (1) the fact that some courts in the State do not adhere to the timeframes pertaining to permanency established by the Adoption and Safe Families Act, (2) the insufficient number of State attorneys representing the child welfare agency in court matters (resulting in continuances and ongoing delays), and (3) the unwillingness of some courts to hear TPR petitions if an adoptive family has not been found for the child.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 1 are presented below.

## Item 5. Foster care re-entries

☒ Strength                      ☐ Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** Six of the 26 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of foster care re-entries because they involved children who entered foster care during the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the entry into foster care during the period under review occurred within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. The assessment resulted in all six cases (100%) being rated as a Strength.

Item 5 was rated as a Strength when a child's entry into foster care during the period under review did not take place within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode. All six of these cases were in Jackson County. There were no cases in Jasper County or St. Louis County in which the child entered foster care during the period under review.

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that re-entry into foster care was a problem in at least some areas of the State. They attributed re-entry to poverty, the scarcity of drug treatment services, intergenerational patterns of chronic neglect, and children's mental health problems. Stakeholders also suggested that large caseloads contribute to the re-entry rate because children's service workers close cases too early and all services are dropped when the case is closed. Consequently, children return to foster care because they need the services and their parents cannot pay for the services. Several stakeholders indicated that this situation occurs frequently when relatives assume guardianship of the child, and lose eligibility for medical and other services. St. Louis stakeholders voiced concern that contractors can keep cases open for only 3 months after children are returned home, noting that this is not enough time to resolve many of the risk issues that remain in the home.

**Determination and Discussion:** Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the following:

- In 100 percent of the applicable cases, children entering foster care during the period under review were not entering within 12 months of a prior foster care episode.
- The data from the State Data Profile indicate that Missouri's re-entry rate (the percentage of children entering care who were entering within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode for FY 2002) of 8.5 percent meets the national standard of 8.6 percent or less.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the percent of entries into foster care occurring within 12 months of a prior foster care episode has decreased from 8.8 percent in 2000 to 8.5 percent in 2002.

## Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

\_\_\_\_ Strength      \_\_X\_\_ Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** All 26 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 6. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the child experienced multiple placement settings during the period under review and, if so, whether the changes in placement settings were necessary to achieve the child's permanency goal or meet the child's service needs. This assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 6 was rated as a Strength in 20 (77%) of the 26 applicable cases.
- Item 6 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 6 (23%) of the 26 applicable cases.

Ratings for this item varied across CFSR sites. Five of the six cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement were in Jackson County. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of Jasper County cases and 87.5 percent of St. Louis County cases, compared to 58 percent of Jackson County cases.

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- Children in 11 cases experienced only 1 placement during the period under review (no placement changes).
- Children in 7 cases experienced 2 placements during the period under review.
- Children in 4 cases experienced 3 placements during the period under review.
- Children in 4 cases experienced 4 or more placements during the period under review. (During the period under review, one of these children experienced eight placement changes and another child had six placement changes.)

Item 6 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child did not experience a placement change during the period under review (11 cases), or that the placement changes experienced were in the child's best interest (9 cases), such as moving a child from a foster home to a pre-adoptive placement or relative home.

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The child experienced multiple placement changes because of a lack of appropriate resources to meet the child's placement needs (5 cases).
- The agency did not make concerted efforts to support a placement that was at risk of disruption (1 case).
- The child's current placement is not stable (2 cases).

Three of the six children in the cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item were adolescents during the period under review. In two cases, the children were 10 years old, and in one case, the child was 4 years old and had experienced 6 placement changes during the period under review.

Most stakeholders commenting on this item expressed the opinion that many children in foster care do not experience placement stability. Jackson County stakeholders noted that foster children in that locality often are placed in emergency foster care for 30 days when they first enter the system. Because of a lack of placement resources, rather than moving from emergency foster care to long-term foster care after the 30-day period, many children are just moved to another emergency foster care placement for another 30 days.

St. Louis and Jasper County stakeholders suggested that placement instability is due in large part to children's behavior problems and the insufficient training and support for foster parents to enable them to effectively parent these children. State-level stakeholders suggested that placement instability may be due in part to the large caseloads carried by children's service workers that make it difficult for them to visit foster homes with sufficient frequency to address potential placement issues when they arise. State-level stakeholders also voiced concern about relative placements because they receive very little support from agency children's service workers and thus are likely to disrupt when problems arise. Finally, several stakeholders voiced concern that often the agency does not provide foster parents with adequate information about the child prior to the placement, particularly with regard to the child's problems.

*Determination and Discussion:* Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the following:

- In 23 percent of applicable cases, reviewers determined that CD had not made concerted efforts to ensure placement stability for the children in foster care.
- Data from the State Data Profile for FY 2002 indicate that the percentage of children experiencing no more than 2 placements in their first 12 months in foster care (78.7%) does not meet the national standard of 86.7 percent or more.

According to the Statewide Assessment, CD policy encourages appropriate matching of children with foster families at the beginning of placement. However, due to the scarcity of available foster family resources, children frequently are placed in emergency foster home care or emergency residential care. The Statewide Assessment notes, however, that emergency placements are limited to 30 days (although case reviews found that some children remained in shelters for as long as 6 weeks). The Statewide Assessment also notes that State FY 2003 data indicate that the average number of placement changes children experience while in alternative care is 3.2.

Information from the Statewide Assessment suggests that the lack of available foster families may be attributed to the low maintenance payments allowed by the State. As indicated in the Statewide Assessment, Missouri has traditionally been rated as one of the lowest States in the nation for basic maintenance payments to foster parents (approximately \$227 to \$307 monthly, depending on the age of the child).

#### **Item 7. Permanency goal for child**

\_\_\_\_ Strength      \_\_X\_\_ Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** All 26 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 7. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 7 was rated Strength in 17 (65%) of the 26 applicable cases.
- Item 7 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 9 (35%) of the 26 applicable cases.

Case reviews found that the children in the 26 foster care cases had the following primary permanency goals:

- 8 children had a goal of adoption.
- 11 children had a goal of reunification.
- 4 children had a goal of guardianship.
- 2 children had a goal of long-term foster care/emancipation.
- 1 child had concurrent goals of guardianship and long-term foster care.

At the time of the onsite review, 18 of the 26 children had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. The agency had filed for termination of parental rights (TPR) in 9 of these cases. For the nine cases for which TPR had not been filed, there was no “exception” or “reason for not filing” noted in the case file.

Ratings for this item did not vary substantively across CFSR sites.

Item 7 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the child's permanency goal was appropriate and had been established in a timely manner. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The goal is appropriate but was not established in a timely manner (3 cases).
- The goal is not appropriate given the needs of the child and the circumstances of the case (7 cases).

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that although the agency and the courts establish appropriate permanency goals in a timely manner for many children, there are many other children in the system whose permanency goals are not appropriate or whose permanency goals were not established in a timely manner. Several stakeholders suggested that this problem is due in part to the high level of worker turnover in the State. They noted that when a case is assigned to a new worker, that worker usually wants to “start over again,” regardless of the case history. This results in situations in which reunification is maintained as the case goal even when there is no evidence that this goal will be achieved. Several stakeholders suggested that there is a reluctance on the part of the agency and some courts to make adoption the child’s goal, particularly if the child is age 12 or older or has special needs.

Other stakeholders reported that the greatest barrier to establishing permanency goals in a timely manner is the poor communication between the courts and the agency. Stakeholders said that the judiciary in one of the review sites generally does not support the timeframes established by the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) and perceives them as a violation of due process. Several stakeholders also suggested that some judges in the State will not terminate parental rights until an adoptive home has been found for the child. However, State-level stakeholders reported that the Court’s *Benchbook of Best Practices* has greatly improved the judiciary’s focus on permanency planning and that when the leadership within the circuit court is focused on timeframes and on moving children toward permanency, appropriate permanency goals are being established in a timely manner. Stakeholders indicated that in some localities children rarely have a goal of guardianship because the court does not view guardianship as an appropriate permanency option.

Finally, there was general agreement among stakeholders that “true” concurrent planning is not taking place consistently across the State. They noted that in most cases in which there are concurrent goals in the case file, there are not concurrent efforts to achieve the goals. Stakeholders reported that even when there are two goals, the courts and the agency usually focus on reunification first, and only when that appears problematic do they turn their attention to the other goal. Some stakeholders attributed this primarily to the courts because they determine what goals the agency can work toward.

***Determination and Discussion:*** Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 35 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that CD had not established an appropriate goal for the child in a timely manner. A key concern identified by reviewers was that the goal of reunification was being maintained by the agency even when existing evidence indicated that the prognosis for reunification was low.

According to the Statewide Assessment, initial permanency goals are established with the family at the time of the 72-hour Family Support Team (FST) meeting. The FST meets every 30 days and reviews the permanency plan until the adjudication hearing. FST

meetings continue to be held every 6 months after adjudication (or more often if requested). The Statewide Assessment also notes that there are a number of quality assurance tools within the child welfare system to track and monitor permanency. The Continuous Quality Improvement teams at the local, regional, and State levels review Missouri's child welfare quarterly outcome reports and monthly management reports. Peer record review data also are collected quarterly and the results are shared with staff.

#### **Item 8. Reunification, Guardianship, or Permanent Placement With Relatives**

\_\_\_\_ Strength      \_\_X\_\_ Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** Item 8 was applicable for 16 of the 26 foster care cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had achieved the goals of reunification or guardianship for children in a timely manner or, if the goals had not been achieved, whether the agency had made, or was in the process of making, diligent efforts to achieve the goals. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 8 was rated as a Strength in 8 (50%) of the 16 applicable cases.
- Item 8 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 8 (50%) of the 16 applicable cases.

None of the cases in Jasper County had a permanency goal of reunification or guardianship. The item was rated as a Strength in 64 percent of the Jackson County cases compared to 20 percent of the St. Louis County cases.

Of the 16 applicable cases, 11 had a goal of reunification, 4 had a goal of guardianship, and 1 had concurrent goals of guardianship and long-term foster care. The goal was achieved in 7 cases (5 reunifications and 2 guardianships); in 3 of those cases, the goal was achieved within 12 months. The child had been in foster care for more than 12 months in 6 of the 9 cases in which the child's goal had not been achieved.

Item 8 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the agency had made or was making concerted efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that CD had not made diligent efforts to achieve the goal of reunification or guardianship in a timely manner.

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that reunifications do not routinely occur in a timely manner. Although many children are reunified with their families very quickly (i.e., within the first 3 months) after their removal from the home, other children are staying in foster care for long periods of time before they are reunified. Stakeholders attributed delayed reunification to (1) an agency practice of keeping children in foster care (e.g., in a trial home visit) even after safety



issues have been resolved, (2) parental relapse into substance abuse, (3) incarceration of parents, (4) lack of adequate housing, and (5) scarcity of services for parents. Stakeholders reported that when parents are able to and willing to access services reunification occurs in a timely manner.

***Determination and Discussion:*** Item 8 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the following findings:

- Data from the State Data Profile indicate that for FY 2002, the percentage of reunifications occurring within 12 months of entry into foster care (65.9%) does not meet the national standard of 76.2 percent or more, and
- In 50 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the CD had not made diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification or guardianship in a timely manner.

According to the Statewide Assessment, in 2000, 68 percent of the children reunified from foster care were reunified in 12 months and in 2002, 65.9 percent were reunified in 12 months. The Statewide Assessment notes that this decline in the percentage of timely reunifications coincides with a period of staff shortages experienced in the CD and that inadequate staffing may be a critical barrier to achieving reunification in a timely manner. The Statewide Assessment also reports that the Peer Record Reviews indicate that family assessments, service plans, and service delivery are areas needing improvement in order to achieve timely reunification. However, as indicated in the Statewide Assessment, Missouri's current information system does not have the capacity to assess the correlations among the number of services, type of services, and/or length of services provided to families and the achievement of reunification in a timely manner.

## **Item 9. Adoption**

\_\_\_\_ Strength        X   Area Needing Improvement

***Review Findings:*** Eight of the 26 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 9. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether diligent efforts had been, or were being, made to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. The results were the following:

- Item 9 was rated as a Strength in 1 (12.5%) of the 8 applicable cases.
- Item 9 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 7 (87.5%) of the 8 applicable cases.

None of the cases in Jackson County and only two cases in St. Louis County involved a permanency goal of adoption. The only case rated as a Strength for this item was in Jasper County.

During the CFSR period under review, adoption was finalized in 2 of the 8 applicable cases; in both of these cases, the adoption was not finalized within 24 months of the child's entry into foster care. All of the six remaining children were in adoptive placements during the period under review.

Item 9 was rated as a Strength in 1 case when reviewers determined that the State was making concerted efforts to achieve the goal of adoption within 24 months of the child's entry into foster care. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when the adoption had not been finalized within 24 months of the child's entry into foster care (2 cases) or reviewers determined that there were unnecessary delays and a lack of diligent effort to finalize adoption in a timely manner (5 cases).

Case review findings indicate that the most significant barrier to achieving adoptions in a timely manner was the agency's failure to file for TPR in a timely manner. In addition, in Jasper County, case reviewers reported that the delays in adoption were due to the excessive caseload of the one attorney contracted to do termination of parental rights. In many cases, the agency recommended seeking TPR, but the attorney did not file TPR for more than a year. Reasons for delays in St. Louis County also were agency-related and pertained to late filings for TPR. In one case, delays were attributed to the need to resolve concerns pertaining to the Indian Child Welfare Act.

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR reported that adoptions are occurring in a timely manner if an adoptive family is readily available and if the agency files for TPR in a timely manner. They noted that the court is likely to approve TPR and to move the case toward adoption if there is an adoptive family. They also noted that a State statute mandates that an Appeals Court must hear TPR appeals quickly, so there are no extensive delays in adoption due to TPR appeals. However, there was general agreement among stakeholders that CD is not consistent in filing for TPR in a timely manner. This was attributed in part to the perception of the agency and the courts that children age 12 and older and children with behavioral issues are "unadoptable." Stakeholders reported that very little is done by the agency or the courts to obtain TPR for a child who does not have an identified adoptive family, particularly a child in a group home or residential treatment center who does not have foster parents who would be interested in adopting him or her.

Stakeholders at the State and local levels expressed concern about the insufficient number of State attorneys assigned to represent the agency in all court matters.

***Determination and Discussion:*** Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the following:

- Data from the State Data Profile indicate that the State's percentage of finalized adoptions in FY 2002 occurring within 24 months of entry into foster care (30.3%) does not meet the national standard of 32.0 percent or more.

- In 87.5 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the State had not made concerted efforts to achieve an adoption in a timely manner.

According to the Statewide Assessment, there has been an increase in the percentage of children adopted within the 24-month time frame and the total number of adoptions has increased from 1,076 in 2000 to 1,337 in 2002. The Statewide Assessment attributes the increase in adoptions to improved CD and court implementation of ASFA and the resources for recruitment and training available through an Adoption Opportunities grant.

Information in the Statewide Assessment indicates that as of August 2003, Missouri had approximately 2000 children with a goal of adoption. It was noted that staff shortages have decreased the capacity to recruit one-on-one for children, which is important in finding families for the hard to place population. The Statewide Assessment also notes that adoption staffing patterns vary across counties with some counties having adoption specialists and others not having access to an adoption specialist.

#### **Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement**

☐ Strength      ☒ Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** Three of the foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 10. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine if the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to assist children in attaining their goals related to other planned permanent living arrangements. The results were the following:

- Item 10 was rated as a Strength in 1 (33%) of the 3 applicable cases.
- Item 10 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 2 (67%) of the 3 applicable cases.

Item 10 was rated as a Strength in the one case when reviewers determined that the child was close to the age of emancipation and was receiving appropriate services to make a successful transition from foster care to independent living. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in one case because reviewers noted that CD had not provided appropriate services to help the child achieve independence and in another case because alternative goals had not been considered before establishing the goal of long-term foster care.

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that the number of children with a goal of long-term foster care has declined in recent years. They also reported that the State offers an array of independent living services and that youth

perceive these services as useful. Some stakeholders reported that youth receive extensive assistance in transitioning out of foster care and can continue to receive services until they are self sufficient.

**Determination and Discussion:** Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in two (67%) of the three applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to assist children in attaining their goals related to other planned permanent living arrangements.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Missouri considers long-term foster care, emancipation, and guardianship as permanency goals of “other planned permanent living arrangement.” It should be noted that in the fall of 2003, the Division eliminated the use of long-term foster care as a goal. The Statewide Assessment also states that independent living services are provided in each area of the State in order to meet the individual needs of youth. While in out-of-home care, adolescents are provided with life skills training, regardless of their placement or permanency goals. Life skills training is one component of a host of programs offered through the Independent Living Program. These programs are not mandatory, but youth are strongly encouraged to participate. Missouri enhanced the capacity to serve younger children (under age 16) by setting aside a portion of the Chafee funding to supplement State funds to provide hands-on learning opportunities through a program called *Choices*. However, due to severe budgetary constraints, State funding for the *Choices* program has been eliminated.

## Permanency Outcome 2

<b>Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.</b>					
<b>Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:</b>					
	<b>Jackson County</b>	<b>Jasper County</b>	<b>St. Louis County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
Substantially Achieved:	7	5	4	16	61.5
Partially Achieved:	5	1	3	9	34.6
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	1	1	3.8
Not Applicable:	12	6	6		

## STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2

Missouri did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 61.5 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

Performance on this outcome varied across CFSR sites. The outcome was determined to be substantially achieved in 83 percent of Jasper County cases, compared to 58 percent of Jackson County cases, and 50 percent of St. Louis County cases.

CFSR case review findings indicate that CD makes concerted efforts to place children in close proximity to their families. However, the findings also indicate a lack of consistent effort on the part of CD to (1) place siblings together in foster care; (2) promote frequent visitation between children and their parents and siblings in foster care, (3) seek and assess relatives as placement resources, (4) preserve children's connections to their families and heritage, and (5) support or promote the parent-child relationship.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 2 are presented below.

### **Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement**

☒ Strength                      ☐ Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** Of the 26 foster care cases, 19 were applicable for an assessment of item 11. Cases determined to be not applicable were those in which (1) TPR had been attained prior to the period under review, (2) contact with parents was not considered to be in the child's best interest, and/or (3) parents were deceased or whereabouts were unknown. In assessing item 11, reviewers were to determine whether the child's most recent foster care setting was in close proximity to the child's parents or close relatives. This assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 11 was rated as a Strength in 18 (95%) of the 19 applicable cases.
- Item 11 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 1 (5%) of the 19 applicable cases.

Item 11 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The child was placed in the same community as parents or relatives (14 cases).
- The child's out-of-county placement was necessary to meet the child's needs (4 cases).

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in one case because reviewers determined that the out-of-State placement with the child's great aunt was not appropriate because she no longer wants to adopt the child.

Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR were in agreement that CD makes concerted efforts to place children near parents, and that most children in foster care are placed in their same county or nearby. St. Louis stakeholders reported that the

Family-to-Family initiative in St. Louis City focuses on finding foster care placements for children in their own neighborhoods. Stakeholders noted that most out-of-State placements occur when the child is placed with a relative.

***Determination and Discussion:*** Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 95 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that CD had made diligent efforts to ensure that children were placed in foster care placements that were in close proximity to their parents or relatives, or were necessary to meet special needs.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the proximity of foster care placement is addressed at the time of Family Support Team meetings and during the case planning and case review process. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the Family-to-Family Project in St. Louis City strives to find placements for children within their own communities and placements that reflect the child's cultural and ethnic background.

#### **Item 12. Placement with siblings**

\_\_\_\_ Strength      \_\_X\_\_ Area Needing Improvement

***Review Findings:*** Nineteen of the 26 foster care cases involved a child with siblings who were also in foster care. In assessing item 12, reviewers were to determine whether siblings were, or had been, placed together and, if not, whether the separation was necessary to meet the needs (service or safety needs) of one or more of the children. This assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 12 was rated as a Strength in 15 (79%) of the 19 applicable cases.
- Item 12 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 4 (21%) of the 19 applicable cases.

Ratings for this item varied across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of Jasper County cases, compared to 80 percent of St. Louis County cases and 62.5 percent of Jackson County cases.

In 15 of the 19 applicable cases, the child was in a placement with at least one other sibling, and in 8 of those cases, the child was in a placement with all siblings.

Item 12 was rated as a Strength if the child was in placement with all of his or her siblings (8 cases), or if reviewers determined that the separation of the siblings was necessary to meet at least one child's safety or treatment needs (7 cases). The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that there was no valid reason for the separation of the siblings.

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that the agency attempts to place siblings together, but that there are not enough foster home resources to accommodate sibling groups.

***Determination and Discussion:*** This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 21 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that CD had not made concerted efforts to place siblings together in foster care whenever appropriate.

According to the Statewide Assessment, CD child welfare policy requires staff to make special efforts to place siblings together whenever possible.

### **Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care**

\_\_\_\_ Strength                        X   Area Needing Improvement

***Review Findings:*** An assessment of item 13 was applicable for 23 of the 26 foster care cases. Three cases were not applicable for an assessment of this item because TPR had been established prior to the period under review and the parents were no longer involved in the children's lives (or parental visitation was terminated by court order), and the child had no siblings in foster care (or visitation between siblings was considered to be not in the child's best interest). In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine (1) whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to facilitate visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings in foster care and (2) whether these visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of children and families. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 13 was rated as a Strength in 16 (70%) of the 23 applicable cases.
- Item 13 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 7 (30%) of the 23 applicable cases.

Ratings for this item varied across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 82 percent of applicable Jackson County cases, compared to 67 percent of Jasper County cases and 50 percent of St. Louis County cases.

Typical visitation between children and their mothers for the 15 cases for which this assessment was applicable was the following:

- Weekly visits – 7 cases.
- Twice a month visits – 1 case
- Monthly visits – 3 cases.
- Less than monthly visits – 4 cases.

In two of the four cases in which visits with mother occurred less frequently than once a month, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation.

Typical visitation between children and their fathers for the 12 cases for which this assessment was applicable was the following:

- Weekly visits – 2 cases.
- Twice a month visits – 1 case.
- Less than monthly visits – 4 cases.
- No visits – 5 cases.

In four of the nine cases in which visits with father occurred less frequently than once a month, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation.

An assessment of visitation among siblings was applicable in 11 cases. Typical visitation between siblings was the following:

- Weekly visits – 2 cases.
- Twice a month visits – 4 cases.
- Less than monthly visits - 5 cases.

In two of the five cases in which visitation between siblings was less than monthly, reviewers determined that the agency had made efforts to promote more frequent visitation.

Item 13 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency of visitation met the needs of the child and parent, or that, when visitation was less frequent than needed, CD had made diligent efforts to promote more frequent visitation. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- CD did not promote sufficient visitation between the child and his/her father (3 cases).
- CD did not promote sufficient visitation between siblings (3 cases).
- CD did not promote sufficient visitation between the child and his/her mother (2 cases).

The opinions of stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR differed across sites. Jackson County stakeholders reported that children's service workers are committed to ensuring that children have sufficient visitation with parents and siblings. Jasper County stakeholders expressed concern that although visits between children and their parents occur once a week on a routine basis, the visits usually are only 1 hour in length and take place in the agency office. These stakeholders also noted that visitation schedules are not sufficiently flexible to accommodate working parents. St. Louis County stakeholders reported that visits are not occurring with sufficient frequency because there are not enough transportation resources to facilitate visits. These stakeholders said that there often are long waiting lists for transportation aides.



***Determination and Discussion:*** Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 30 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that CD had not made concerted efforts to ensure that visitation between parents and children and between siblings was of sufficient frequency to meet the needs of the child.

According to the Statewide Assessment, visitation between parents and siblings in foster care is arranged on an individual basis and is usually intended to occur either in a neutral setting or in the out-of-home care placement. Visits also occur during monthly Family Support Team meetings and may be more frequent based upon the Team recommendations for the family. Visitation plans and schedules are developed at the time of the Family Support Team meetings.

#### **Item 14. Preserving connections**

\_\_\_\_\_ Strength      \_\_X\_\_ Area Needing Improvement

***Review Findings:*** All 26 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 14. In assessing item 14, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to preserve the child's connections to neighborhood, community, heritage, family, faith, and friends while the child was in foster care. The assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 14 was rated as a Strength in 21 (81%) of the 26 applicable cases.
- Item 14 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 5 (19%) of the 26 applicable cases.

In 20 of the 26 cases, case reviewers determined that children's primary connections had been “significantly” preserved while they were in foster care; and in 6 of the 26 cases, reviewers determined that children’s primary connections had been “partially” preserved. In two cases, the child in foster care was Native American. In one case, reviewers determined that CD had notified the Tribe appropriately and had made concerted efforts to ensure that the child’s connections to the Tribe were maintained. In the other case, reviewers noted that CD had not contacted the Tribe in accordance with the provisions of the Indian Child Welfare Act.

Item 14 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that CD had made diligent efforts to achieve one or more of the following:

- Preservation of child’s primary connections with extended family members (19 cases).
- Preservation of child’s primary connections with school, community, and friends (5 cases).
- Preservation of child’s primary connections with religion and ethnic/racial heritage (2 cases).
- Preservation of child’s primary connections with former foster parents (2 cases).

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The agency had not made appropriate efforts to ensure that the child's connection with his Native American heritage was preserved (1 case).
- The agency had not made efforts to preserve the child's connections to extended family (4 cases).
- The agency had not made efforts to preserve the child's connections to family, friends, community, or culture (2 cases).

Some stakeholders commenting on this item reported that CD makes concerted efforts to preserve connections, although other stakeholders suggested that cuts in the budget have had a negative impact on the agency's ability to preserve children's connections. A few stakeholders noted that religious beliefs are not taken into account when children are placed in foster care. Other stakeholders indicated that part of the foster parent training focuses on the foster parent's responsibilities with regard to preserving children's connections.

***Determination and Discussion:*** Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 19 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that CD had not made diligent efforts to preserve children's connections. A key concern identified by case reviewers was that CD is not consistent in its efforts to promote or maintain children's connections with extended family members.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Missouri policy requires that all terms of the Indian Child Welfare Act be followed in cases in which the child or family is identified as being Native American.

### **Item 15. Relative placement**

\_\_\_\_\_ Strength      \_\_X\_\_ Area Needing Improvement

***Review Findings:*** All 26 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 15. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives (both maternal and paternal relatives) as potential placement resources for children in foster care. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 15 was rated as a Strength in 21 (81%) of the 26 applicable cases.
- Item 15 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 5 (19%) of the 26 applicable cases.

Ratings for this item varied across CFSR sites. The item was rated as a Strength in 100 percent of Jasper County cases and 87.5 percent of St. Louis County cases, compared to 67 percent of Jackson County cases.

Item 15 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that children were placed with relatives (13 cases) or that CD had made diligent efforts to search for both maternal and paternal relatives (8 cases). The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the child was not placed with a relative and CD had not made diligent efforts to search for either paternal or maternal relatives (1 case), or had searched for maternal but not paternal relatives (4 cases).

Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that CD views placement with relatives as a priority and makes concerted efforts to seek relatives as placement resources, including conducting searches for absent fathers. However, a few stakeholders indicated that the court sometimes will not place children with relatives because there is a perception that some problems, such as substance abuse, are intergenerational or are likely to be exhibited by more than one family member. Other stakeholders suggested that agency children's service workers need to be more diligent in seeking appropriate relatives.

Several stakeholders also voiced concern that there is little financial support for relative caregivers and that agency children's service workers who are responsible for relative caregiver families (Legal Status 3 cases) have very high caseloads and generally cannot provide relatives with case management or other services. Missouri does provide financial support for relative caregivers through several programs. One program is available through the Division of Family Support, and the CD provides several other programs specifically for relative caregivers. A few stakeholders expressed concern that the court will order placement with a relative before a criminal background check has been completed. However, if the Division is placing a foster child in a relative placement, a criminal background check and a child abuse and neglect check must be completed along with competency-based training and a home study prior to placement.

***Determination and Discussion:*** Item 15 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 27 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that CD had not made diligent efforts to locate and assess all relatives as potential placement resources.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Missouri child welfare policy requires that when out-of-home placement is considered, priority must be given to immediate and extended family members. The Statewide Assessment notes that the Point-in-Time Permanency Profile indicates that the number of children in relative foster homes decreased from 24 percent in Federal FY 2000 to 20.7 in Federal FY 2002. The Statewide Assessment also notes that Missouri's *Grandparents as Foster Parents Program* is an Income Maintenance program that offers financial support to grandparents, and in some cases, other relatives who care for related children in their custody or guardianship. However, children receiving services under this program are not in the custody of the Children's Division and applicants for this program must meet a needs test of 200 percent below the Federal poverty level. The Statewide Assessment notes that funding for this program was severely cut by the legislature in 2003.

## Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

\_\_\_\_\_ Strength      \_\_X\_\_ Area Needing Improvement

**Review Findings:** An assessment of item 16 was applicable for 19 of the 26 foster care cases. A case was considered not applicable if parental rights had been terminated prior to the period under review and parents were no longer involved with the child, or if a relationship with the parents was considered to be not in the child's best interests. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to support or maintain the bond between children in foster care and their mothers and/or fathers. This assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 16 was rated as a Strength in 13 (68%) of the 19 applicable cases.
- Item 16 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 6 (32%) of the 19 applicable cases.

Item 16 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that CD had made concerted efforts to promote the parent-child bond of children in foster care. These efforts included encouraging visitation and providing therapy and counseling to parents. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the agency did not promote parental involvement with the child or attempt to strengthen the parent-child relationship through visitation or participation in other activities. In four of these cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not made sufficient efforts to promote the child's relationship with the father by encouraging visitation with the father or involvement of the father in planning for the child.

St. Louis stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR reported that parent-child bonding is promoted by maintaining visits, encouraging letter writing, involving parents in school meetings, and inviting parents to medical appointments. Barriers to bonding were lack of sufficient transportation, parental behavior at visits, and parents' work schedules.

**Determination and Discussion:** Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 32 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that CD had not made diligent efforts to support the parent-child relationships of children in foster care. A key concern pertained to a lack of effort to maintain children's relationships with non-custodial fathers.

According to the Statewide Assessment, there are a number of initiatives in the State that are designed to promote the relationship between children in foster care and their parents. Several initiatives focus on developing and maintaining positive interaction between children in foster care and parents who are incarcerated; a Transition from Prison to Community Initiative is a model developed through the National Institute of Corrections and a pilot project being planned for all women's prison facilities is being developed to assist with transportation, supervision, and counseling for children and their mothers. In addition, a federally-funded demonstration project, called the Fatherhood Initiative, is being implemented to provide opportunities, resources, and supports to promote

responsible fatherhood. The Statewide Assessment also notes that State child welfare policy requires agency staff to make and document diligent efforts to locate absent or missing parents of children in foster care.

In addition, information in the Statewide Assessment indicates that State child welfare policy requires staff to encourage parents to discuss out-of-home placement in a positive manner with the child and to assist the family in notifying the child's school, doctors, dentists, and others with whom the child may have been involved. A visit between the child and parents is required to occur prior to the initial 72 hour team meeting unless the court has restricted visitation. Birth parents also are encouraged to remain involved in the decision making process throughout placement and to be involved in developing life books for children when appropriate.